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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ELECTION CAMPAIGN ROUND-UP NUMBER ONE

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Summary and Analysis

1.(SBU) In this first edition of periodic round-ups of election-related developments post hopes to provide over coming weeks:

-- By delaying national elections until August 27, Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) has given her ruling People's National Party (PNP) time for grassroots, ground-level campaigning in hopes of improving trends that PNP insiders say point to a very close race.

-- Initially wrong-footed by PSM's election date announcement, opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Leader Bruce Golding has regained his balance and reiterated a longstanding call for fixed election dates in the future.

-- With the historical specter of election-related violence hanging heavily over the country, the leaders and supporters of the two major parties send disparate signals. PSM and Golding jointly condemn "any act of provocation, intimidation, or political violence that has already smeared the campaign." However, whether either party leader has real control over his/her supporters remains unclear. Isolated acts of random violence are ominous, and could escalate and then spiral out of control (reftel).

-- For their part, the police claim they systematically are targeting communities troubled by political violence and will ensure the safety of voters and election workers.

-- Former Prime Ministers P.J. Patterson (PNP) and Edward Seaga (JLP) have taken on contrasting roles in the campaign: the former as an active behind-the-scenes PNP strategist, the latter as a detached observer and commentator.

-- Meanwhile, the powerful Minister of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce, Phillip Paulwell, a close advisor and confidant of PSM, is at the center of yet another alleged scandal - this one involving cellular telephone licenses.
End Summary and Analysis.

Election Date Catches Most by Surprise

2.(SBU) Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM)'s announcement that Nomination Day would be August 7 and the general election would be held August 27 took most Jamaicans (including members of her own ruling People's National Party - PNP) by surprise. Speculation has been rife over the reason for the 7 week-long campaign with two plausible reasons gaining currency: First, the Prime Minister is known to openly consult a self-styled religious "Prophet" who may have advised her of the importance of the number 7. Thus, Nomination Day will be on the 7th, the election

on the 27th, and there is a 7 week wait between the announcement and the election. Second, and perhaps more credibly, the Prime Minister was under pressure to call the election but knew her party had not yet been able to unleash its "campaign machine" to full effect. Therefore, she chose to call the election, but to delay the actual date as long as possible to give the PNP time for grassroots, ground-level campaigning in hopes of improving trends that PNP insiders say point to a very close race.

Golding Wrong-footed?

3.(SBU) Upon hearing the announcement of the election date, the opposition Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) leader Bruce Golding initially reacted with annoyance (at best) and outright anger (at worst). He since has regained his composure, but has consistently pounded the PM for the lengthy campaign, alleging that the longer Jamaicans wait, the more likely election violence will erupt between the two parties.

JLP Calls for Fixed Election Dates in Future

4.(SBU) Golding also has reiterated the JLP's longstanding call for fixed election dates in the future, maintaining that the PM's power to arbitrarily call elections - when it is most convenient to the ruling party - places an unfair burden on the opposition. He has proposed changing the Constitution to adopt a fixed election date within 100 days of assuming power. Some legal scholars, however, maintain that: 1) this cannot be achieved in the promised 100 days after elections, and, 2) it may not be legal. Constitutional lawyer and Chairman of the electoral watchdog group Citizens Action for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE) Dr. Lloyd Barnett has commented that the provisions in the Jamaican Constitution are "entrenched" and

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cannot be removed through ordinary legislation. He also has noted that despite JLP's description of the parts of the Constitution which they wish to amend or remove entirely related to calling elections, the party has overlooked an important factor: the role of the Governor General. Thus, while a JLP Government might be able to remove the PM's discretion to set an election date, it is actually the Governor General who has the authority to dissolve parliament. Once parliament is dissolved, elections must be called within 90 days.

Violence or Peace:
Party Leaders and Supporters Send Mixed Messages

5.(SBU) The historical specter of election violence hangs heavily over Jamaica. The threat, based on incidents of violence including the murder of hundreds during the 1980 elections, has been compounded by the long campaign cycle. Both PNP and JLP candidates as well as the leaders of both parties have publicly pleaded with Jamaicans to refrain from violence. Despite this, sporadic acts have increased, including at least four shootings (resulting in two deaths) and one arson as well as stoning of motorcades, shooting at political party members, and vandalism.

6.(SBU) Parliament agreed to a "Political Code of Conduct" in September 2005 governing the conduct of elections. The Code, among other things, rejects political tribalism, violence, and voter or party intimidation. If a party feels there has been a violation, they are required to first speak directly with the appropriate person in the other political party to reach a resolution. Failing that, they may take their grievance to the Political Ombudsman - Bishop Herro Blair. If the Ombudsman is unable to resolve the conflict, parties may take their case to court. As of July 17, the Ombudsman had received 39 complaints since February (27 since June alone). The Ombudsman can also call candidates or party leaders to meet with him if he feels it necessary. He summoned both PSM and Golding to his office on July 13; following their meeting, the two leaders issued a joint statement condemning "any act of provocation, intimidation, or political violence that has already smeared the campaign. We want no further politically connected injury, loss of

life or loss of property."

7.(SBU) Yet even as the leaders plea for peace and calm, they also convey their feelings that the other party is responsible for violence. Golding has made several statements suggesting that PSM is responsible for the violence because the campaign period is too long. Simpson Miller, on the other hand, suggests that Golding's frequent references to violence in a long-campaign period may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whether either party leader has real control over his/her supporters remains unclear. A long-time Embassy contact who is normally quite insightful regarding party politics, has dismissed all violence against the JLP as having been instigated by the JLP itself to gain sympathy; when asked why either side would resort to violence, she replied "the PNP will not draw first blood, but we have to respond."

Shootings in Mountain View

8.(SBU) Over recent days, three persons have been wounded by gunfire in the volatile Mountain View neighborhood in the urban constituency of Eastern St. Andrew, a traditional JLP stronghold. One man reportedly was attacked and shot after objecting to political banners being posted in front of his house. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), augmented by the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), deployed a large contingent of police and troops to the neighborhood the night of July 17; they have set up buffer zones in an effort to prevent the conflicting parties from coming together to attack each other. Ombudsman Bishop Blair led a "peace walk" through the neighborhood on July 18 in an effort to dampen tensions."

JLP Candidate's Vehicle Hit by Gunfire

9.(SBU) In a separate incident, the JLP's outspoken candidate for the hotly contested Southeast St. Andrew seat, Joan Gordon Webley, claimed that her vehicle had been sprayed with gunfire. Police reportedly are investigating.

10.(SBU) Deputy Commissioner of Police Linval Bailey has announced that the JCF will increase its presence in a number of communities troubled by political violence in the run-up to the August 27 election date. He maintains the police will ensure voters have free passage to polling stations, and that election workers and observers will be safe. Among the "hot spot" areas to receive special police attention are Woodford Park, Mountain View, Central Village in South-Central St. Catherine, and Stony Hill and Brandon Hill in West Rural St. Andrew.

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Contrasting Roles of Former Prime Ministers

11.(SBU) For his part, former PM and respected political father figure P.J. Patterson appears to have assumed an active behind-the-scenes role in advising PSM and organizing the PNP's campaign. He reportedly has opened a campaign strategy office in the Liguanea area of Kingston, and is likely to play a low-profile but pivotal role as the PNP's senior strategist. In contrast, former PM Edward Seaga has chosen not to become directly involved in the JLP's campaign. In a detached and reflective editorial published in the "Jamaica Gleaner," Seaga noted that Jamaican voters were influenced more by catchphrases, slogans, and street language than by party manifestos or detailed logical argument, concluding that: "Those who are seeking a more straightforward issue-oriented electoral system, less colorful and less 'folksy', must encourage the development of a more successful education system capable of dealing with issues. Otherwise, the country will continue to operate on a fiction of democracy."

12.(SBU) Meanwhile, the powerful Minister of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce (MITEC) Phillip Paulwell, a close advisor and confidant of PSM, is at the center of yet another controversial scandal. Paulwell noted that the sale of the country's fourth

cellular license would go, after extensive due diligence, to a company known as Solutrea Jamaica, Limited. Solutrea was to pay JMD 510 million (approximately USD 7.5 million) for the license. When it became unclear that Solutrea had, in fact, paid the full sum, the Opposition JLP seized upon the case. Shadow spokesman for Mining, Energy, and Telecommunications, Clive Mullings, discovered that the license was sold without all required agencies agreeing to the sale.

It was further uncovered that Minnette Palmer, and advisor to Paulwell, owns a company which is a shareholder of Solutrea. While this kind of practice is common in Jamaica, its timing (just six weeks before the election) gives the JLP something into which to sink its teeth.

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